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From voiceless to voicing: the communication empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors by using participatory video

Abstract

This paper examined the impacts of participatory video used in digital training on the empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors in the Philippines. Due to their traumatic experiences, these survivors faced a challenge to reach out and then integrate into the host societies. For survivors of online sexual exploitation involved in this study, technology played a critical role in their abuse, making it necessary to understand how technology-supported communication can also play in their recovery and personal development. Drawing upon the thematic analysis of data collected from debriefing, interviews, and participants-generated videos, the findings have shown that the participatory video as a tool to support communication, as a mirror for reflexivity and voicing, and as a mediated space to connect and gain support, affords a communicative platform for survivors to participate, to interact, and to take control of the technology. We argue that the use of Information and Communication Technology for empowerment is subject to the personalized needs, autonomy and participation of the users.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking is an international crime, marked by extreme forms of physical, sexual, or mental violence against men, women, and children. Throughout history, it is closely related to slavery and deeply rooted in countries' social and economic conditions (Logan et al., 2009). Estimates from 2016 cite that on any given day 40.3 million people are held in these abusive and exploitative situations worldwide (Walk Free Foundation, 2018). The Trafficking in Persons Protocol (Palermo Protocol) defines human trafficking as consisting of three elements: the act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons; utilizing threat of use of force, fraud or coercion; for exploitation (UNHCHR, 2000). While the Palermo Protocol cites severalpurposes of exploitation, this work considers exploitation for sexual exploitation, referred to as sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age (Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, 2000). Of the trafficking survivors identified, those exploited for sex account for about sixty per cent (UNODC, 2018). Facilitated by digital technology, online sex trafficking is perceived to be "increasingly anonymous, invisible, and are not rooted in a specific location" (Hickle, 2017, p. 98).

The exploitative human trafficking experiences, are conceptualized as a multi-staged process of cumulative harm across the following phases of trafficking: recruitment, travel and transit, exploitation, and finally (re)integration (into the sending country or the host country) in post-exploitation (Zimmerman et al., 2011). Survivors of exploitation not only suffer from physical, sexual, and psychological harm but face the likelihood of being marginalized or stigmatized in society

(Zimmerman et al., 2011). Even though various interventions, (including immigration and law enforcement, social and health services, and protection and security), are coordinated to smooth the recovery and integration of trafficked people, this transition is a complex and long-term process.

In the post-trafficking phase, researchers note that attention must be paid to support for the "critical bridge between the past and its debilitating emotions, and a future of self-sufficiency […] enabling survivors to successfully participate in mainstream society" (Zimmerman et al., 2003, p. 99), during which the role of technology is well-noted. Focusing on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), research has revealed that digital training promotes psychological healing, self-expression, community building, and employment opportunities (Huskins & Sullivan, 2008; Poveda et al., 2019).

As a form of participatory media, participatory video (PV) has been recognized as an instrument to empower its users (particularly the vulnerable populace) through telling their stories and the world around them (Shaw & Robertson, 1997; White, 2003). Also, the therapeutic role of PV has been discussed, mainly to improve the health and well-being of vulnerable and migrant populations (D'Amico et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2016). However, few studies have explicitly investigated the potential of PV for the recovery of sex-trafficking survivors.

This paper, based upon the studies of ICT in rehabilitation and PV empowerment, explores how PV training helps to create a communicative space for sex-trafficking survivors during their (re)integration into society. Methodologically, PV acts as a media, product, and process. In the present study, the sex-trafficking survivors held the camera themselves,learning how to use a video camera to film and edit, followed

by reflexive discussions of their videos. Accordingly, PV supports the creation of participant-generated video as products for analysis and serves as an intervention where ICT can aid the empowerment of vulnerable groups by prioritizing the participants' choice and control throughout the creative process, factors that are often robbed from survivors during their exploitation. This turning point is further examined in this study to discuss the communication empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors at intrapersonal, interpersonal and community levels.

2. Sex-trafficking in the Philippines and Integration

The Philippines is known as one of the largest migrant-sending countries in the world. Since its economic decline during the 1970s, Filipinos have sought job opportunities overseas, primarily working as caregivers, construction workers, domestic helpers, and entertainers. Survivors of internal trafficking in the Philippines suffer from forced labour, debt bondage in agriculture and fishing, and sexual exploitation (Nyqvist et al., 2018). Sex trafficking, including that of children, is encouraged and common, especially during tourist seasons (Graycar & McCusker, 2007; US Department of State, 2017). Within the Philippines, where this study is situated, online sexual exploitation is widespread. Tens of thousands of (female and male) children in the Philippines are estimated to be trapped in the sex trade, with a growing number of them abused online for global clients. Many of those cybersex trafficking survivors werebexploited by their own families and aged 12 or younger (Blomberg, 2019). One example is that survivors are tricked into initially providing self-generated indecent material, and then extorted to continue producing more. These videos are recorded as well as streamed live to clients around the world. After being rescued, survivors are required to stay in one of 26 shelters operated by the

Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). However, most shelters do not offer facilities to meet survivors' needs or provide long-term support (Nyqvist et al., 2018). To supplement this gap, Social Enterprises (SEs) in the Philippines have started to support survivors' recovery and integration needs (Poveda et al., 2019). Though the relevant studies have discussed the economic empowerment and core skills required in a workplace setting (Gill & Tsai, 2020; Tsai, 2017) in post-trafficking, the well-being and development of those trafficked persons deserve much more attention.

Recovery and integration occur after individuals have been rescued and identified as trafficked. Integration is defined as the process of recovery and social-economic inclusion (Surtees, 2010, p. 24), which specifies trafficked persons' multi-aspect development including "settlement in a safe and secure environment, access to a reasonable standard of living, mental and physical well-being, opportunities for personal, social and economic development and access to social and emotional support". Over this period, a series of services, such as medical check-up and psychological consultations provided in shelters, vocational training for obtaining employability, micro-credit loans for starting social businesses (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2008; Surtees, 2010; Van Hook et al., 2006), assist and support survivors. In addition, more personalized schemes have been recommended to suit survivors' need for recovery and reintegration, since integration is associated with vulnerabilities at economic, social-cultural, individual/familial, and institutional levels (Pandey et al., 2013).

However, sex-trafficking survivors are still at risk of being marginalized and isolated during this reintegration phase. For instance, they often suffer physical and

mental health consequences including depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and isolation from family and friends (Gerassi et al., 2021) due to limited movement and access to medical care during exploitation. Moreover, they may experience feelings of lack of control of their lives, and face challenges to heal from the traumatic victimization. They struggled with complex trauma, limited social interactions, and frustrations with the legal system (Sukach et al., 2018). When these survivors seek ways to manage and cope with the consequences of their exploitation, they frequently experience a lack of autonomy and a frustrated sense of agency in the pursuit of their goal (Viergever et al., 2019).

3. Communication for Development and Participatory Video Empowerment

As noted previously, survivors require holistic support, enabling them to integrate successfully back into society and seek personal development. Argued against the modernization paradigm, which states that development problems could only be resolved through economic assistance, communication is an intrinsic factor in development. It provides people with opportunities to get access to relevant channels by creating "systems, modes, and strategies," and the created "ensuing communication environment" could enhance their living qualities (Moemeka, 1994, p. 64). Among sex-trafficking survivors, getting a chance or space to establish the social bonds post-trafficking could be the first step to reach out and then recover from victimization. This can enable them to gain trust, acceptance, understanding, respect, and guidance from their peers and family, in order to start a new life (da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019). Therefore, this study focuses on the communication for development approach to explore the empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors.

Since the late 1960s, a participatory view of development, criticizing the modernization paradigm as a "top-down, ethnocentric and paternalistic" (Waisbord, 2020) has gradually gained broad support. As a result, the main tasks of development communication are illustrated as encouraging participation, stimulating critical thinking, and stressing processes (Altafin, 1991). The communication model shifts to dynamic interactions involving stakeholders and policymakers in the development process (Mefalopulos, 2008) rather than a linear and unidirectional dissemination of values and information to bring about the intended changes (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Built upon the participatory communication perspective, the role of a communication process in development studies highlights the spaces created for people and communities to identify, discuss, and implement their developments (Bessette, 2004; Dutta, 2011; Quarry & Ramirez, 2009). Extending from the diffusion-to-participation communication models to communication technology, the instrumental role of media and ICT for information transmission and communication generation in development communication initiatives has aroused attention.

PV, concerning its relation to communication and empowerment studies, is useful in cultivating participatory communication. In this process, the exchange of information and bottom-up knowledge sharing is of greater importance than persuasion and top-down information dissemination (Servaes, 1996; White, 2003; Yang, 2016). Defined as a collaborative filmmaking process, PV has been found to motivate active communication among participants (Nair & White, 2003), through which the power distance between researchers and participants is narrowed by providing participants with opportunities to construct and develop their narratives, and ways to represent themselves. As Koningstein and Azadegan (2021) have found, PV is a useful tool for two-way communication between researchers and the

marginalized group by equalizing power dynamics and incorporating local perspectives. In community-based development (Kindon, 2003), PV encouraged participants to communicate with each other and use shared knowledge for community development. Apart from recognizing PV as a helpful tool for participatory research, researchers (Chiu, 2009; Zoettl, 2013) also perceived PV itself as an intervention enabling self-consciousness, a sense of identity, and belonging within the community. In this study, PV is not limited to be used as a tool to collect participants-generated video products for analysis. Instead, it also functions as an intervention to support sex-trafficking survivors' self-development and training.

The therapeutic role of PV has been examined across a wide variety of populations. In a study involving leprosy-affected participants, PV use contributed to the greater sense of togetherness, increased self-esteem, individual agency, and willingness to take action in the community (Peters et al., 2016). Also, the reflective use of emotion like discomfort, gratitude, and trepidation identified in PV practice created relational spaces among migrants, the facilitation team, and their living environment (Lin et al., 2019). Among children and youth affected by global adversity, the use of participatory visual methods such as PV has been argued to offer "a potential opportunity to engage in both research and intervention" to promote their health and well-being (D'Amico et al., 2016, p.541)

Unlike many other vulnerable groups, many participants in the present study are survivors of online sexual exploitation. After rescue, survivors stay in shelters until they become adults and/or they are able to take care of themselves. Participants of the research presented here, found stable employment in a SE which provided holistic support, towards their work skills and wellbeing, to support their recovery or

reintegration. Participants were, as the literature indicates, struggling with trauma, marginalization, lack of autonomy and a frustrated sense of agency as a consequence of their experiences. For those surviving online sex-trafficking, technology played a critical role in their abuse; as the tools, such as a webcam, were used for their exploitation and cohersion. Accordingly, exploring the role of PV, in particular for those which have had such a negative experience with technology, is very important to explore if and how technology-supported communication can also play a role in their recovery. By do so, this exploration aims toextend the literature on the empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors by exploring the potential of PV.

Additionally, even though many studies have focused on other types of communication for empowerment, such as community broadcasting or journalism, discerning relevant information, and internet surfing, little attention has been paid to the role of interpersonal communication and empowerment (Cadiz, 2005). Participatory media is indeed conducive for development, by involving members and exchanging ideas. Based upon the idea that "communication for empowerment is a process rather than a technique" (Cadiz, 2005, p. 151), building participants' capabilities in communication is well accepted as a significant component of empowerment. Finally, another gap in the existing literature is on the role technology can play in the recovery of survivors who were exploited using technology. In support of the participatory approach of PV in communication development, this paper examines PV empowerment in the process of integration by answering the question:

How does PV facilitate the communication empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors in post-trafficking?

4. Methodology

The present study is situated in a SE that provides business process outsourcing (BPO) services using an ethical sourcing model, offering back-office support, customer service, accounting services, and digital photo and video editing, founded in 2014. In the Philippines context, the SE aims not only to provide both a living wage through enhanced technical skills and long-term employment in a supportive environment, but also an environment where survivors of exploitation (including sex trafficking, labour trafficking, gender-based violence) can progress toward achieving full and sustained recovery and reintegration (Poveda et al., 2019; Gill & Tsai, 2020).

Prior to beginning this study, the authors obtained research approval from the United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society Ethics Board. Once obtained, the authors requested the SE to recruit participants with a broad cross-section of the length of service at SE. While participants did self-refer for the training, only survivors of sexual exploitation were invited and were contacted directly by the SE to maintain their privacy. As a result, thirteen SE employees aged 19-27 volunteered to attend the training. Their working experiences at SE varied: six participants ranged from zero-six months, four participants up to 24 months, and three of more than four years. During 13 hours of training over two weeks on video camera use (e.g., video recording, pausing, audio input, microphone, a role-play interview), filming (e.g., camera angles, zooming, camera stability, audio quality, lighting, film shots), and editing (e.g., using Premiere Pro software), two facilitators gave only directions to the participants, never touching the equipment, as a way to encourage ownership and loss of any technology fear. The tasks were a mix of individual and group work to encourage self-learning and teamwork. The final task was a group video (13 participants were divided into three groups). Participants used their discretion in discussing their experiences of training within the SE, focusing on a

specific audience (new employees, management staff, potential SE customers). During this process, PV played a dual role as a process and to create and discuss content. PV not only acted as a tool or media for participants to learn how to use the technology; but also encouraged participants to communicate and reflect on what they have learned. This process highlighted amongst other things, participants' creativity, confidence, and collaboration.

Data collected for this paper include transcripts of: debrief sessions between research team members after each PV training session; semi-structured interviews with 13 sex-trafficking survivors and seven managerial staff at SE; and participants-generated videos. This approach is justified as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 2002, p. 178). The facilitating team conducted each debrief session to improve any shortcoming of the program by understanding the participants' reflections, like their most enjoyed activities, how to define the movie theme, the aim of the film, their thoughts about the PV, and achievements. At the end of the training, all 13 survivors took part in a one on one interview lasting about 30 minutes by sharing their life changes, working experiences at SE, and both digital and soft skills (such as confidence, creativity, teamwork, resourcefulness, and conflict resolution) development through the PV process. Also, seven management staff at SE were interviewed to triangulate findings by comparing the participants' reporting and the staff's observation.

All reflections and interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of participants, and verbatim transcribed for thematic analysis. The accessibility and

flexibility of the thematic analysis are not only appropriate for research of multi-methods but have great potential for participatory research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Driven by our theoretical and analytical interest to uncover how PV plays a role in communication empowerment of sex-trafficking survivors, the deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify the transcript relevant to participants' perceptions of communication barriers in post-trafficking, communicative practices of PV, and their development in communication. The first author manually coded and analyzed the data. The themes centred on the key topics that emerged from analysis such as technology use, current living and working barriers, and perceptions of PV. On top of this, the three videos created by participants as an outcome of the training were analyzed to compare and contrast with the emerging themes in interviews. All authors reached a consensus on how to analyze, organize, and report themes found.

5. Findings and Analysis

Drawing upon the data collected, this section demonstrates the impacts of the PV training at the intersection of technological empowerment, media, and communication. In the eyes of participants as sex trafficking survivors, integration is usually one of the biggest challenges for them to restart their lives.

5.1 *Communication Challenges of Sex Trafficking Survivors*

Affected by their traumatic experience, sex-trafficked persons are often entrapped in their stigmatized identity, afraid of being discriminated against or scorned in daily life. These negative feelings deter them from reaching out to others, even isolating them from their family. A 25-year-old participant living alone in Cebu shared,

…you know, because some of the people that we, that had an experience that we had, sometimes it is tough for them to merge in, or to connect with other people. Like the 'normal people' as they say, I think.

They reported that, (re)building interpersonal relationships with family, friends or colleagues has become a significant barrier.. This same support from friends, family, and interpersonal relationship has been highlighted by other researchers to be crucial throughout sex-trafficking survivors' recovery (O'Brien, 2018; Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). Like all workplaces, intra-office politics was identified as a problem for communication. As one participant who has been working at the SE for over four years mentioned, "*there are some individuals that doesn't like each other also*". In reality, the shared trafficking experience does not assure effective communication and harmonious relationships in the group or community. Consequently, these breakdowns in communication could make survivors' integration into the new environment difficult, in particular without communal support and social bonds.

Though social networking sites have been identified as an effective tool for newcomers to socialize (Ellison et al., 2007) and the importance of the new communication channels (Obregón & Tufte, 2017) in communication for development and social change (CDSC), online interaction does not seem to be a feasible solution for some of the survivors. As participants reflected, when they started working "*I do not have phones*" or "*I don't know what to do in the computer*". A female administrative staff of the company further explained,

…a lot of our survivors that have, let's say, forever, photos of themselves on the Internet, right. Um, and you know the sense of shame that comes with that.

She noted that most participants were once exploited by people through technology. Combining this experience with the limited access or use of technology, many participants had little self-confidence with technology when they began working at SE. After receiving the training and working at the SE, they grew in their love of working with computers.

In this study, our PV training sessions provided participants with another opportunity to be in control of the content produced and the technology by holding the camera in their hands. The facilitators of the PV process purposefully did not touch any cameras themselves, forcing participants to begin to take control from the first session. As part of their homework exercises, participants were encouraged to record their daily life, express their ideas and feelings, and exercise reflections upon the past. Whilst many homework exercises were set as individual tasks, exercises within classes were completed in small teams (composed of four or five participants). The final assignment for the course was to develop a short video within their team, and then share the video among participants, the research team, and administrative staff. The PV process created opportunities for participants to share their ideas, improving their communicative practice at individual, group, and community levels.

5.2 *PV as a Mirror for Reflexivity and Voicing*

Awareness of the status quo is crucial to improve participants' critical thinking and self-transformation. Like one 5-month pregnant participant described,

> Um...I think...before I didn't know that I was a victim [laugh]. Yeah. So, people used to call me, you know, 'prostitute.'…so when I go out from the shelter they always tell me, some people will judge me, yeah.

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The final task in PV training offered them an opportunity to reflect upon their life journey since they started at the SE, and to display their perceived personal changes. Observing the past, participants struggled with stigma, but they reported that they would not change their past, as it was their experiences that allowed them to become who they were today. This reflection highlights their perception that they are no longer who they were before, and they have become different people. Participants shared all these changes with the audience through the participant-generated videos where you could identify the story of their past, present, and future.

In one of the final video assignments of the PV training course, four participants described their past with a mixture of images and text. As shown in Fig.1 Screenshot 1, a female image curling up in the dark corner is shown, coupled with the message:

Insert Figure 1.

"Individuals who are in pain, hopeless, defeated and judged". This scene aims to depict what had happened and how vulnerable they were in the past. This is followed by a message of hope: *"know that it is not the end"* (as shown in Fig.1 Screenshot 2). As discussed in another paper (Poveda et al., 2019), participants reflected that meaningful employment at SE had helped them with their recovery. They noted that they were no longer entrapped in their past and suffering from pessimistic attitudes towards their lives. They perceived how they had changed, and how much they had grown. This is most obviously demonstrated in Fig.1 Screenshot 3, where they recognize how they are "making differences". In this scene, they are shown having stable jobs and practical skills such as photo editing and video shooting. This self-awareness marks the beginning of the transformation "from no one to someone". The film ends with these participants holding hands with one another, and raising

them to the sky, expressing their expectations and hopes for the future as a team. The other two groups also voiced what changes they had made by using text like "second chance", "become a better and reliable person in the future", "together we strive and together we reach our goals", "let's make a difference", in the videos. Through those video messages, participants actively observed their livelihoods and created a new life context which they were confident in their capabilities to achieve. Moreover, the exercise of recording their daily life and life story during the PV process, enhanced the participants' critical thinking skills. This resonated with what a female management staff has observed, producing a video is "*really creative…, thinking first what their storyboards are going to look like, and then making that happen. That is the kind of thinking, analytical thinking that we need*". In particular, participants demonstrated the capability of perceiving personal changes, judging what benefits them in the long run, and hoping to be "better and reliable" in the future. In this way, PV is mediated as a process of self-representation for personal development.

Apart from acting as a process that encourages reflection, PV also offered participants space to creatively develop and to have their voices valued and heard. Using their words, PV is like "*our stress reliever, it can also express our feelings, like...we're happy, we're grateful*". This idea is consistent with what has been observed by the Director of Human Resources at SE:

> PV gives them a chance to tell their story…that means so much to them…I have talked to each of them, and it's a recurring theme that nobody appreciates them at home and the fact that somebody cared to listen to what they have to say means so much to them.

In summary, acceptance, care, and support are of great significance for survivors to move on and start their new career (da Silva & Sathiyaseelan, 2019). However,

connecting with people (either in their home or work networks) can be complicated for some participants. PV firstly triggered the development of intrapersonal communication of participants by encouraging new narratives of life context. Secondly, PV provided a mediated space where participants' voices could be heard by community members and family.

5.3 *PV as a Mediated Space to Connect and Gain Support*

Vulnerable populations are often highly cautious and reticent to share their personal experiences (Zimmerman & Watts, 2003). In this study, participants reflected that their "stigmatized" identity impedes them from reaching out, accepting, or trusting outsiders (including researchers), a similar experience voiced by sex trafficking survivors in mid-west USA (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018). However, the PV training course broke down these barriers between researchers and participants, providing space for participants to slowly overcome their hesitation, distrust, and fear. Through in-session knowledge sharing and interactions, and after-class focus groups, researchers and participants overcame these barriers, with participants feeling free to share their life stories. It is important to note that in interactions between researchers and participants, researchers did not initiate any discussions about participants' life experiences prior to their employment at the SE. However, if a participant began speaking about their experiences, the researcher did not stop them. Over the two weeks of sessions, participants overcame their fear and developed trust and friendships with researchers. This has been observed by a management staff who commented,

> So,actually, when you ask them to share and they don't really limit their sharing… I mean they are very very open and I know for sure that they are very comfortable of sharing.

The findings accentuated the role of PV in providing equitable exchanges between researchers and participants (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2021), which encourages mutual learning and understanding and empowers participants by emphasizing their agency.

Apart from the role of PV training in equalizing power dynamics and incorporating the marginalized group, it also promoted closer relationships among colleagues. By doing PV assignments to plan, film, and edit the video together, participants gradually developed their communication skills via teamwork and became friends and family. A 26-year-old participant described,

> Somehow, because we have a lot of disagreement during the filming [all laugh] so we somehow fight, and shout at each other... Yeah so I know it's hard, especially working as a team. But...yeah, but the thing is it will create you to a good teamwork. So it helps me to understand more about teamwork.

When working together, participants learn how to communicate, manage conflict, compromise, respect others' opinions, and help each other. They learned how to get along with teammates, therefore enhancing their psychological well-being and bringing them joy. Commented by management staff, the relationships among participants attending the PV training course flourished. One of them reported,

> When she said she liked it, because she was able to have a stronger and closer relationship to other teammates. She said that, 'even though we're not close before,' and then she said she likes it now, because they became, there was like a bonding.

Participants perceived positive outcomes of the PV training in supporting them to resolve disputes in producing videos. Regarding interpersonal communication, PV helped with the communicative dynamic in trust gaining and teambuilding. For participants themselves, PV provided them with a platform to exhibit their changes, share stories, and voice their minds. Based upon these communication capabilities enhanced by PV, their analytical skills, and creativity in video making were also further demonstrated. Management staff recognized this development and how it could support their work outputs.

> That is the kind of thinking, analytical thinking that we need, that they need in order to produce really good outputs.

When participants left the shelters and started to work at SE, many were in disempowered and vulnerable conditions, such as low self-esteem, humiliation, and lack of awareness. In particular, communication was recognized to be one of the significant barriers preventing them from connecting with family, colleagues, and friends. In many cases, survivors were also not comfortable using technology as once it was used as a tool for their exploitation. In response to these challenges, the findings demonstrated the potential for PV to transform sex-trafficking survivors at intrapersonal, interpersonal and community levels. As an interpersonal communication tool, PV afforded survivors more active interactions with the outside world such as bonding interactions among family, colleagues, and researchers rather than avoiding interactions at home. Also, the PV process embeds a reflexive attribute, contributing to users' reflections on their experiences, and their awareness of personal changes. Through PV, these survivors' inner voices were given space to be expressed and heard. Other findings, such as the impacts of company culture, and heath and core

skills training on exploited survivors, were broadly discussed in another academic paper (Poveda et al., 2019).

6. Discussions and Conclusion

This study identified three cases where ICT empowerment occurred within a PV training course: as a tool to support communication; as a mirror for reflexivity and voicing; and as a mediated space to connect and gain support. PV has been identified as a facilitator in bottom-up information sharing as a participatory tool and consequently stimulates community development. On top of this, the role of PV for empowering the participants with communicative space in a participatory process was shown to contribute to their integration and personal development, which extensively addresses a complementarity between the human development and participatory approach. As Sen (2009, p. 249) argues, "Development is fundamentally an empowering process" by highlighting the citizens' freedom built on valued functioning, real opportunities, and decision making. This section further discusses the three factors including afforded communicative practices, technological access and individual agency to explain the featured potential for PV in communication empowerment.

First, as a participatory praxis in ICT empowerment, PV affords the communicative practices at multifaceted levels and contributes to participatory development. As indicated, building communication capabilities is included in development (Jacobson, 2016), and is one of the key valued functionings of sex-trafficking survivors. The tailored PV process not only brought mutual understanding and support, developing critical awareness, but mediated a space to express voices, expanding the sex-trafficking survivors' capabilities to cope with the

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long-term impact of their exploitative experience. In this process, communication is not for informing but for transformation. This change, to a large extent, echoed the three non-linear stages of PV use (Shaw, 2012). Those building blocks including interactions between video makers, expressions and reflections of their experiences, and being social by sharing user-generated videos with a larger audience have been explicitly found in this study.

Stepping further, we should also emphasize the actionable properties of PV by taking the affordance approach. Focusing on ICT empowerment and human trafficking, various methods including ICT training (Huskins & Sullivan, 2008), social photo-elicitation (Gautam et al., 2018), aspirations-based designing (Kumar et al., 2019) and photovoice (Lockyer & Koenig, 2020) have been used to empower and support survivors. Different from digital storytelling which affords the elicitation of individual participant narratives, PV co-constructs the group's advocacy, and its technical features (e.g., replay, film, re-edit) employed in social context enable the users of self-reflection, dissemination, and social action, which then contributes to development (Roberts, 2017; Roberts & Muñiz, 2020). In this study, the video camera attributes adopted in a participatory process dynamically afford the space open to dialogue at multi-levels of communication. Through the mediated communicative space, the survivors enact self-reflection, mutual trust and collaboration, and collective voice, which ultimately constitutes a more robust social integration.

The afforded communicative practices of PV could be applied to a broader context of counter-trafficking. In practice, anti-human trafficking intervention initiated to "prevent and combat human trafficking, protect victims and persons vulnerable to trafficking, and prosecute traffickers" (Davy, 2016, p. 489) have been

conducted at the national, regional, and international level. Published by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) in September 2020, studies in *The Anti-Trafficking Review* situate everyday abuses within the global economy and demonstrate interventions or methodologies such as preventing wage theft, addressing the information asymmetries, collaborative soundwalk, to support survivors of labour trafficking. The existing condition is that workers experiencing everyday abuses rarely regard themselves as survivors of exploitation, and most trafficking interventions target individual cases (Quirk et al., 2020). In attempts to enhance the status quo, PV use could facilitate the voicing of the survivors' everyday life, their reflections on lived experiences and the group actions to fight against human trafficking by enhanced self-awareness, shared knowledge and collaboration.

However, the functioning of PV at intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels could not fully suit the complex needs of sex-trafficking survivors (Rajaram & Tidball, 2018) as the integration is processual, and the ensuing challenges are also involved in social, economic, legal and institutional settings, more than on individual and familial aspects (Ramaj, 2021). Therefore, the potential of PV for empowerment should be based on the personalized needs of sex-trafficking survivors at the specified phase of integration. Moreover, a paradoxical approach to PV participation, exemplified as mediating the relationship between participant and researcher, and simultaneously resulting in surveillance and detachment (Whiting et al., 2018) gives us a deep understanding of ICT empowerment by reflecting whether PV use, in this case, has posed any risks or disempowerment to the survivors.

Second, the potential for PV is signified by technology redemption, the flipping role of technology in exploitation. While we cannot say which participants were

exploited with technology, at the beginning of the PV course many were not comfortable with the recording equipment. How does the PV process wipe out these negative feelings like shame, fear, and loss of freedom in their traumatic experience? The key lies in a "hands-off" approach used by researchers: enabling participants to carry the cameras in their own hands to film, make decisions of the narratives, and edit the videos they produce. From being exploited by users abusing the camera to shaping new ways of interacting with it, the PV process facilitated a shift on how to approach technological access, creatings a shift in the balance of power. And by taking control of the camera, the capabilities of the survivor are enhanced. In the present case, participants positively interacted with technology and developed their critical consciousness, trust and awareness through communication. As described by the CEO of the SE, *Technology that was once used for bad can instead be a[n] instrument of good. That "Work", which previously was exploitative and destructive, instead can be a positive influence and a place for flourishing*".

Third, ICT empowerment depends much on how users interact with it, which indicates the boost of users' agency and autonomy. Within the exploitation and trafficking discourse, the labels of "survivors" or "victims" are employed, and invoke specific narratives and reactions. The concept of victimization can deny the autonomy and agency of trafficked persons, indicating powerlessness (Surtees, 2007). In contrast, the survivor discourse emphasizes the empowerment and/or psychological changes of trafficked persons in their transition from victims to survivors (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Our participants volunteered in PV training, confidently used the cameras, and actively interacted with each other. Their participation is empowerment. In the PV session, the participants had input and control over their PV work, not only through holding the cameras in their hands, but making decisions of content, filming

and editing. This power relation encourages and enables participants to act as agents for change. Through this process, power dynamics were balanced based on mutual respect and trust among participants and researchers. Moreover, the status of trafficked persons is not only determined by their experiences, but also by the perceptions of those having contact with them, and having "power to affix or reject such a label" (Hoyle, et al., 2011, p.315). The management staff offers another perspective to evaluate the participants' status by positively commenting on their changes over the PV process. So, the participants in our case should be identified as survivors to emphasize their agency and capabilities development.

Due to their painful and traumatic experiences, these survivors felt voiceless, which has been one of the most significant barriers for them to integrate and gain personal development. With the assistance of PV creating a communicative space for survivors to participate, to interact, and to take control of the technology, they started to reflect upon what they have experienced, learn how to work collaboratively with teammates, and bravely voice out for themselves by exposing themselves to the camera again. It is important to note the importance of users' autonomy and participation in the creation of these communicative spaces. By itself, a camera(or any technology) can not serve to empower a marginalized group, but coupled with a process such as PV, it can be used carefully to support a safe space for survivors to reflect and recover.

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Figure. 1 Screenshots of Video Produced by Sex-trafficking Survivors
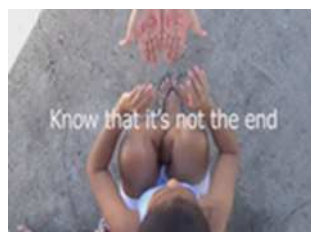
Screenshot 1 Past   Screenshot 2 Present   Screenshot 3 Future